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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH LITHUANIAN PARLIAMENT'S
AMERICAN CAUCUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Damian R. Leader for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a lunch with the Ambassador on December 4, 15 members of the American caucus of the Seimas (parliament) expressed concerns about the level of U.S. and NATO commitment to the Baltic states, NATO defense planning, Afghanistan, missile defense, and relations with Russia. The Ambassador thanked the legislators for Lithuania's steadfast efforts in Afghanistan. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador was invited to lunch at the Seimas Dec. 4 with the Group for Interparliamentary Relations with the United States, better known as the American caucus. With 54 members, the American caucus is the fifth-largest of 42 such groups in the 141-seat Seimas, surpassed only by caucuses for Germany (69 members), Russia (66), Ukraine (66) and Kazakhstan (62). Fifteen members attended the lunch with the ambassador.

Afghanistan

¶3. (C) The Ambassador thanked and praised Lithuania for its leadership of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Ghor Province, Afghanistan. Seimas member Mantas Adomenas asked about the new strategy for Afghanistan. "We're happy with the surge and the new troops, because we're worried that our rebuilding effort in Ghor could be endangered otherwise," he said. "But after 18 months, doesn't the promised withdrawal create the possibility of a second Vietnam, with all the efforts and achievements being put at risk because of instability?" The Ambassador said that the United States would not withdraw without achieving its goal of denying Al Qaeda a place to regroup in Afghanistan or Pakistan, and that the increase in troop levels and civilian aid was designed to strengthen the Afghan government and increase stability.

¶4. (C) Seimas member Petras Austrevicius suggested that Lithuania need not always be asking for assistance, but could be proactive. "We have a small number of troops in Afghanistan, and that's enough to keep things under control in Ghor Province. But why don't we increase the number of our Special Operations Forces in the south, if not by 50 percent, then at least by 20 percent? The sooner we act, the sooner we will get results."

Women's rights

¶5. (C) Seimas member Birute Vesaitė said she was "very pleased with the decisions of President Obama on reproductive health issues and the shift in policy" to allow recipients of USG grants to provide information or counseling regarding abortion. She also praised the appointment of Secretary Clinton, whom she called "a strong fighter for women's rights." The Ambassador said that the President and the Secretary have made empowerment of women an important pillar of U.S. policy.

NATO and Russia

¶16. (C) Adomenas said he was worried that the importance of the Baltic region would be marginalized as the United States took on a more multipolar view of the world. He said the "abandonment of missile defense without warning was one such step. In this multipolar world, what is the role for small states such as the Baltic states? Is the new defense concept of NATO going to say anything about this? Will we still remain in the sight of NATO in any way?"

¶17. (C) The Ambassador replied that the United States had not abandoned, but only modified and made more effective its missile defense plans. She also reassured the Seimas members that neither the United States nor NATO has decreased its attention or obligations to the Baltics. "Article 5 (of the NATO Charter) is ironclad. The United States is absolutely committed to fulfilling its Article 5 commitments," she underscored.

¶18. (C) Other Seimas members pointed out that Russia has taken aggressive actions against Lithuania, both through a recent, large military exercise and through economic actions such as banning some Lithuanian imports and making it difficult for Lithuanian trucks to carry cargo into Russia. Member Gintaras Songaila asked how the United States was reacting to Russia's recent announcement of a new European security policy. The Ambassador said the United States has suggested to Russia that the OSCE already exists to address such issues, because we believe human rights and economic

issues are indivisible from military security. Continuing the Corfu process would be the best way to approach the Russian proposal and other ideas for tackling European security challenges.

Holocaust

¶19. (C) Parliamentarian Vilija Aleknaite-Abramikiene said that Lithuania has drawn not only retaliation from Russia but also criticism from some countries and international Jewish groups for supporting the Vilnius Declaration, which was adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly when it met in Vilnius over the summer. The declaration calls for a thorough examination of both of the major totalitarian regimes in Europe in the 20th Century: the Nazis and the Russians under Stalin. "They say we want to diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but the Vilnius Declaration is a very balanced document with a view of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. But we want to find the right formula to commemorate what happened during this long (Soviet) occupation," Aleknaite-Abramikiene said.

Science, technology and tuberculosis

¶10. (C) Seimas members and the Ambassador said they looked forward to the Lithuanian ratification of a bilateral Science and Technology Agreement signed earlier this year, and hoped it would foster closer cooperation that would benefit both countries. Aleknaite-Abramikiene said the agreement should be approved by a Seimas committee within days, then be forwarded to the full Seimas for ratification.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador urged the caucus to take advantage of a World Health Organization program that could save the GOL money while making the fight against disease more effective. The USG spent several years and about 400,000 USD helping Lithuania gain access to the Green Light Program, which allows the purchase of medicines to fight multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) at heavily discounted prices. Although MDR-TB is a major problem in Lithuania, the GOL has never used the program and instead continues to procure drugs locally. Seimas members said they

were unaware of the program and would take the issue up with GOL health officials.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: The American caucus brings together Seimas members, including leaders and members of nearly every political party faction, who care about and support a strong U.S.-Lithuania relationship. Caucus members can be our best allies and proponents in the Seimas, and they are eager for substantive contacts, both with the Embassy and with visitors from Washington. In exchange for demonstrating their support for issues of concern to the U.S. (such as the Seimas' recent vote to extend Lithuania's mandate in Afghanistan to 2013), they expect the U.S. to recognize their serious concerns on certain issues, in particular the threat that Russia poses to Lithuania. End comment.

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